

GOOD KING HÁTAM

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There was once a poor man, who used to earn a few *pánsas* by cutting and selling wood. It was a hard struggle to support himself and wife and seven daughters. Never a bit of meat touched his lips, never a shoe covered his feet, and only a rag covered his back.

One day, when not feeling very well, he lay down under a tree to rest. The lucky-bird *Humá*^[1] happened to be flying about the place at the time, and, noticing the man's poverty and sickness, pitied him. So it flew down beside him and deposited a golden egg by his bundle of wood. In a little while the woodcutter awoke, and seeing the egg, picked it up and wrapped it in his *kamar-band*^[2]. He then took up his load and went to the *woni* who generally bought it. He sold him the egg for a trifle. He did not know what a wonderful egg it was, but the *woni* knew, and asked him to go and get the bird that laid it, and he would give him a rupee as a gift. The man promised, and on the following day went to the jungle as usual to prepare his load of wood. On the way back he sat down to rest under the tree where he had found the egg, and pretended to sleep. The bird *Humá* came again, and noticing that he was still as poor and as ill-looking as before, thought that he had not seen the egg, and therefore went and laid another close by him, in such a spot that he could not possibly miss seeing it; whereupon the woodcutter caught the bird, and rose up to carry it to the *woni*. "Oh! What are you going to do with me? Do not kill me. Do not imprison me, but set me free," cried the bird. "You shall not fail of a reward. Pluck one of my feathers and show it to the fire and you shall at once arrive at my country, *Koh-i-Qáf*^[3], where my parents will reward you. They will give you a necklace of pearls, the price of which no king on earth could give."

But the poor ignorant woodcutter would not listen to the bird's pleadings. His mind was too much occupied with the thought of the rupee that he felt certain of getting, and therefore he fastened the bird in his wrap,

and ran off to the *woni* as fast as his load would permit. Alas! however, the bird died on the way from suffocation. “What shall I do now?” thought the woodcutter. “The *woni* will not give me a rupee for a dead bird. Ha! ha! I will show one of its feathers to the fire. Perhaps the bird being dead will not make any difference.” Accordingly he did so, and immediately found himself on the *Koh-i-Qáf*, where he sought out the parents of the bird and told them all that had happened. Oh, how the parents and other birds wept when they saw the dead body of their beloved relative!

Attracted by the noise, a strange bird that happened to be passing at the time came in and inquired what was the matter. This bird carried a piece of grass in its beak, with which it could raise the dead.

“Why do you weep?” it said to the sorrowful company.

“Because our relative is dead. We shall never speak to it again,” they replied.

“Weep not,” said the strange bird. “Your relative shall live again.” Whereupon it placed the piece of grass in the mouth of the corpse, and it revived.

When the bird *Humá* revived and saw the woodcutter, it severely upbraided him for his faithlessness and carelessness. “I could have made you great and happy,” it said, “but now get you back to your burden of wood and humble home.” On this the poor man found himself back again in the jungle, and standing by the load of wood that he had prepared before he was transported to *Koh-i-Qáf*. He sold his wood, and then went home in a very sad frame of mind to his wife and daughters. He never saw the bird *Humá* again.

[0] Narrator’s name, Qádir, a barber living by Amírá Kadal, Srínagar.

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[1] A fabulous bird of happy omen peculiar to the East. It haunts the mountain Qáf. It is supposed that every head it overshadows will wear a crown. The Arabs call it *’anqá*, and the Persians *símurgh* (lit. of the size of thirty birds). ↑

[2] Called also *hul* and *lungí*, a long piece of cotton stuff worn round the waist over the outer garment. ↑

[3] Another name is *Koh-i-Akhzar*, another *Koh-i-Zamurrad* (lit. the green or emerald mountain). The Muhammadans believe that these mountains encircle the world, and that they are inhabited by demons. They

think that this mountain range of emerald gives an azure hue to the sky. Hence in Persian *az qáf tá qáf* means the whole world. The name is also used for Mount Caucasus. ↑

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